

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 IO-03 L-01 SP-02

INR-05 CIAE-00 CU-02 PRS-01 NEAE-00 /041 W

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P R 071215Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0000

INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

S E C R E T AMMAN 5372

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, JO, IS,XF

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER'S COMMENTS ON PARTITION OF HEBRON MOSQUE

1. PRIME MINISTER RIFAI, WITHOUT ASKING FOR ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR, MADE MAJOR POINT TO ME DURING TALK AUGUST 7 ABOUT VERY SERIOUS REACTION HE EXPECTS IN ARAB AND MUSLIM WORLD OVER PARTITIONING BY ISRAELIS OF IBRAHIMI MOSQUE IN HEBRON. (LOCAL PRESS IS FULL OF STORY,(SEPTTEL)

NO DOUBT AT RIFAI'S URGING). WE NOT INFORMED OF FULL PARTICULARS, BUT AS WE UNDERSTAND IT MOSQUE SHELTERS TOMBS OF JEWISH PARTIARCHS AND AS A RESULT OF RECENT RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES IN ACCESS FOR WORSHIP THE MOSQUE HAS BEEN PARTITIONED OR REPARTITIONED BY ISRAELI AUTHORITIES FURTHER LIMITING MUSLIM ACCESS.

2.RIFAI STRESSED THAT HEBRON MOSQUE IS A PILGRIMAGE SPOT OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE FOR MUSLIMS AND THAT RECENT PARTITION ACTION MEANS THAT A VALID PILGRIMAGE TO THE PLACE CANNOT BE, OR IS ASSUMED BY MUSLIMS HERE NOT TO BE POSSIBLE NOW.

3. WHILE WE LACK DETAILS, THE UPROAR WHICH THE PRESENT ACTION APPEARS TO BE ON THE WAY TO CAUSING RUNS RISK OF EVENTUALLY PUTTING IT ON A PAR WITH THE ISSUE OF EXCAVATIONS BY THE ISRAELIS ON THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE MOUNT WHICH LED TO THE UNESCO PROBLEM, THE

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EFFECTS OF WHICH WE ARE STILL TRYING TO HANDLE. RIFAI MENTIONED,

WITH CHARACTERISTIC EXAGGERATION, THAT NEXT WE WOULD HAVE ISRAELI ZEALOTS TEARING DOWN THE AL AKSA MOSQUE TO REBUILD SOLOMON'S TEMPLE TO EMPHASIZE HIS FRUSTRATION AT TRYING TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUE AT A DISTANCE AND IN A TEMPERED FASHION.

4. WE RECOGNIZE THAT THERE MAY BE NOTHING WE CAN DO IN THIS REGARD. HOWEVER, AN EARLY EFFORT TO LOOK AT SOME COMPROMISE MIGHT GO SOME WAY TO STOP AN ADDITIONAL LARGE PROBLEM FROM ARISING AND WOULD CERTAINLY HELP HERE AND QUITE POSSIBLY IN THE ARAB WORLD. WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR ANY COMMENTS WHICH TEL AVIV AND JERUSALEM HAVE TO OFFER AND IF POSSIBLE ANYTHING POSITIVE WHICH I COULD TAKE BACK TO RIFAI AS A CALMING GESTURE.
PICKERNG

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SHRINES, PLACES OF WORSHIP, RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 AUG 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: RowellE0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975AMMAN05372
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750273-0090
From: AMMAN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750871/aaaackwm.tel
Line Count: 74
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: RowellE0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <22 MAY 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <03 OCT 2003 by RowellE0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRIME MINISTER'S COMMENTS ON PARTITION OF HEBRON MOSQUE
TAGS: PFOR, JO, IS, XF
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006